



## LEADINGBLOG



### Our Stewardship Responsibility

The Chick-Fil-A corporate purpose statement goes like this:

*To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us and to have a positive influence on all who come into contact with Chick-fil-A.*

In [Covert Cows and Chick-fil-A](#), former executive vice-president and chief marketing officer, Steve Robinson explains that for Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-fil-A, the most important phase in the purpose statement was, “**by being a faithful Steward.**” And the most important word in that phrase was “**by.**”

His premise was this business does not glorify God unless it is built upon great stewardship of the assets, talents, influence, and relationships entrusted to us. He felt accountability to his Creator—accountability for everything the Creator put into his hands and, thus, our hands—so he wanted a business that focused on doing those things well.

Caught up in our day-to-day work, the idea of stewardship easily moves into the background. For Chick-fil-A, it guides everything they do. Even when drawn into controversy, regardless of personal beliefs, they act as stewards and, therefore, the need to have a *positive impact* on **all** who come into contact with Chick-fil-A. That's the power of a clear purpose statement. “We were not a Christian business,” writes Robinson, “but rather a

business where the owners and leadership aspired to apply and live out biblical principles.” Truett said that they weren't a ministry and that he wanted “people to discover what we believe because of how we treat them.”

The stewardship idea guides their marketing. Marketing is about more than transactions. It's about relationships.

When you're building a brand based on emotional engagement rather than transactions, an investment at the personal engagement level is many times more efficient and effective than a media-weighted strategy.

We didn't look at customers as “Oh, we have two thousand customers a day going through a particular store.” No, we've got two thousand people choosing to visit that store. They each have their own issues, problems, challenges—they each have their own story. They're in the midst of a story at the very moment they encounter Chick-fil-A. Now, how did we impact their story? How did we deliver “where good meets gracious”? **How did we help make their story today better?** Quite frankly, they may not be having a good day, and Chick-fil-A has the potential to help change the script.

They contacted Horst Schulze and Danny Meyer to better understand service and hospitality. Horst told them, “**Don't look to be better than the other fast-food restaurants. Those limited expectations will just weigh you down.** Instead, aspire to the next level of service—restaurants with a price point that are at least double Chick-fil-A's, and build a service model that resembles those.” That mindset led them to create the **Core 4**: create eye contact, share a smile, speak with an enthusiastic voice, and stay connected to make it personal.

#### The Cow Campaign

The iconic Cow “Eat Mor Chikin” campaign developed from an idea by David Ring of The Richards Group. It is, as Robinson describes—engaging, endearing, and enduring. Stewardship comes into play here too. A former Chick-fil-A marketing consultant said, “They

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don't wavier. They don't shift. That is refreshing, and from a marketing standpoint, it can be very valuable, as you can see with the Cow campaign. They have resisted the urge to gussie it up, to change it, to get rid of it, or to do the wrong thing with it."

We also took great care ensuring the Cows never became shills for Chick-fil-A. They were in this thing for their own self-interest, not Chick-fil-A's. If their work started to look too much like they were advertising *for* Chick-fil-A, such as promoting specific products and ingredients, they would quickly lose their edginess and even their believability.

The cows are not on the Chick-fil-A payroll.

### Six Legacy Principles

These six principles, based on Truett Cathy's leadership, have guided every decision at Chick-fil-A and help to keep it uniquely different.

#### 1. Being a Good Steward

The concept of Stewardship allows one to be both generous and thrifty. "Every dollar mattered whether invested in the business, people, or charity. Stewardship is an idea you live.

#### 2. Building Long-Term Relationships

Truett wanted all relationships to be for life. "He was giving his full commitment, and he wanted the same in return. In his mind, if you were going to be a part of Chick-fil-A, there was no reason for you to ever go anywhere else in your career."

#### 3. Providing Hospitality

Truett's heart of hospitality is captured in the phrase, "My pleasure" that he asked everyone to say. "My pleasure creates an immediate communication that you really do matter. The phrase is transformative in terms of the guest's experience."

#### 4. Taking Personal Responsibility

When Truitt "selected people to work at Chick-fil-A or to become restaurant Operators, he sought people he knew could do the job, and then he trusted them to do it. He gave us the keys then stepped out of the way.

We were personally accountable to him, to the brand, and to our customers. We were accountable in the deals we created, in the relationships we built in the business, in our behavior on the road, in how we talked about the business, even in our language on the golf course. When he placed his trust in us, we responded with personal accountability.

#### 5. Choosing Personal Influence over Position Power

Truett and former company president Jimmy Collins believed, "If I ever have to use position power to influence somebody, I'm probably only going to get to do that once. And if I have to do it at all, it probably does not bode well for their future."

#### 6. Having Fun

Don't take yourself too seriously. "One of the virtues that evolved in the business was a tangible effort to be unexpectedly fun."

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